

# THE OLDE BRICK

## WITNESS

THE ASSASSINATION OF AN AMERICAN PRESIDENT



AN ORIGINAL PLAY BY CALEB-MATTHEW WILLIAMS  
"A NIGHT NEVER TO BE FORGOTTEN."





# **CAST**

**(in order of appearance)**

Mary Surratt	Marnie Azzarelli
Clara Harris	Leba Lanton
Henry Rathbone	Chris Eibach
Mrs. Nelson Todd	Kathryn Priestash
Mr. Nelson Todd	John Jacobs
Lewis Powell	Drake Nester
David Herold	Dominick Azzarelli
Laura Keene	Mandy Boyle
Harry Ford	EJ Leeson
Jacob Soles	Jacob Wescott
Dr. Charles Sabin Taft	John Arena
Mrs. Taft	Sandra Opshinsky
William T. Kent	Paul Gallo
Katherine Evans	Liz Stanton
William Whithers	Eric Lutz
Charlotte Whithers	Sadie Shapiro
Harry Hawk	Drake Nester
Mrs. Muzzy	Paige Balitski
Jeannie Gourlay	Kelly Ann Walsh
E. A. Emerson	David Hunisch

**TIME: April 14, 1865**

**PLACE: In and around Washington, DC**



## DIRECTOR'S NOTES

All of the characters in this play are actual people who once walked this earth, and some are more faithfully portrayed than others, but a historical re-enactment this is not, and was never intended to be. I am not a historian, and the assassination of Lincoln nor the end of the War Between the States has never been an event that I had much interest in, but the idea of this play was developed around a table at a friend's house who considers herself a historian (knowing what a giving and selfless person she is, she would only be embarrassed by the mention of her name, so I will refrain from that). In the beginning, I only superficially researched the characters so as to not feel constrained in their dramatization. What I have found interesting about the writing of this play, is how an initial idea can almost become lost as the play itself transforms during the many and endless revisions and how the characters almost demanded further inquiry. These people were intensely fascinating.

Most people would regard this play as a historical drama, but I have always seen it more as an allegory. One hundred and fifty years ago we were coming to the end of a divided nation with an immensely unpopular President hailing from Illinois. Sound familiar? "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it," as Santayana wrote. In 1865 half the states were complaining of federal overreach and fighting to deny civil rights to a class of people. Yet, here we are in the present day, and we still have states complaining of federal overreach. My home state of Alabama's Supreme Court has ordered its probate judges to defy a federal court order that it regards as federal overreach and in so doing they continue to deny a class of people their civil rights.

I think the most controversial person portrayed in this script is that of Mary Surratt, the first woman executed by the United States. The Mary Surratt seen this evening, however, is based more on my own mother, than the woman who was hanged. My mother was a woman who lived her life as she pleased. She was beholden to none, but loved by all. She experienced immense tragedies, but held her head high and continued moving forward. She worked herself to an early grave so that her sons would have the material things she did not have, and she loved us with a fierce and burning love that could be both freeing and suffocating. She had many regrets, but understood that regret would not change the past and she continually tried to look forward rather than behind. My greatest regret is that I did not let her read this play in its unfinished form.



I expected she would see it on stage, but one year ago she died, suddenly. It is because of her that this play is finished. In the past, I would have walked away from it because of the regret I felt regarding withholding it, but the lesson she taught to keep moving forward compelled me to continue.

There are many others who have inspired and nourished me and if it were not for them *Witness* would not be. My grandmother and mother gave me everything I needed, and more. My father is the only dad I will ever have. Jane Lindsley, my first drama teacher, gave me the tools to understand the theater and taught me how truly transcendent the stage can be. Buddy Manley, my first director as a professional, taught me the importance of the audience, and further built upon the strong foundation that Jane had begun. They were amazing mentors, but first and foremost, they were my friends. DD Andersen, the best friend a gay boy in Alabama could have ever had, and truly one of the most talented actors I have ever had the privilege to work with. Angela Gates Wilhite, a woman of impeccable taste and breeding and grantor of confidence when I needed it most. Paige Balitski, a visionary, a sounding board and a friend. Susan Shapiro, the lady that saved me when I felt most alone, and a person I know I can count on no matter what. The Board of Directors of Diva Theater for greenlighting this project and being welcoming to new talent and home to so many. Helen Lavelle and Lavelle Strategy Group for being a champion of this project and doing so much to make it a success. The entire cast and crew of *Witness* who have given so selflessly to make this script come to life, each and every one of you are amazingly talented, and I feel humbled to be in your presence.

It is my sincere hope that the many sponsors and advertisers understand my deep gratitude. This production has been made possible through your support. If it were not for individuals and organizations like you this world would be much worse off. You change lives!

James Cunha, my friend and my husband, you have given selflessly to make this happen. You are the hardest working man I know, and my life would not be what it is if you were not in it. There are not words capable of expressing my gratitude and love.

As stated, the play, *Witness*, is a work of fiction based on actual people, and in some cases uses the characters very own words, but not in an effort to recreate factual history.



## WHO'S WHO IN THE CAST



**MARNIE AZZARELLI** (*Mary Surratt*) is delighted to be in *Witness* since she has been an actor, writer, and researcher for Azzarelli Historical Productions for over ten years. She is also a co-founder of the Slocum Hollow Historians, and a docent at the Lackawanna Historical Society where a playbill from *Our American Cousin* at Ford's Theatre is displayed on the second floor. This is the second time she's performed at The Olde Brick Theatre, the first being *Very Vignette: A Night of Original One Acts--The Blister Sisters*. When not performing on stage, or talking about the lives of dead people, Marnie writes horror stories that only scare herself, and reviews TV shows that make her cry. She lives with her four cats and two parents in Scranton, Pennsylvania.



**DRAKE NESTER** (*Lewis Powell, Harry Hawk*) of Emmaus, PA is excited to work on his second production with Diva Theatre and Caleb. His first was *Very Vignette: A Night of Original One Acts*. Drake, a resident of Pittston, PA, has been acting since he was ten years old. Truth be told, his first role was Baby Jesus in a church Christmas skit. He has also worked in high school, college, community, and Off-Broadway theatre. Some favorite roles include Mercutio in *Romeo and Juliet*, Chandebise/Poche in *A Flea in Her Ear*, and Jay in K.K. Gordon's *The Operatives of Game Theory*. Drake is an account manager at Net Driven in Scranton, PA and enjoys all things technology related. He would like to thank Caleb for this opportunity and his mother for her never ending support.



**MANDY BOYLE** (*Laura Keene*). Founding member of the New Vintage Ensemble (NVE). NVE: *Pride & Prejudice* (Electric City Readers Choice Award, Best Theater Performance 2013); *The Last Cocktail Party of Venus*; *RXV: Reunion 15*; *Whispers of Scranton Legends*. Diva Theater: *Very Vignette: A Night of Original One Acts--The Blister Sisters*. Gaslight Theater Company: *Playroom: Attic/Monster in the Attic*. Marywood University: *The Affected Damsels*; *Wanted: One Groom*. Numerous staged readings. Playwright of *My Condolences*. Co-founder of NEPA BlogCon. SEO Team Lead at Net Driven. Freelance writer and enthusiastic eater. Nerdy by nature. Much love to my rowdy family, Annie & BDP.



**ERIC LUTZ** (*William Whithers*) is from Scranton and a graduate of the University of Scranton. He stays busy with local theaters throughout the region and has had recent roles, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, *The Crucible*, *The Glass Menagerie*, *Titanic*, *Harvey*, *The Mousetrap* and *Cats*. Eric originated the role of "Brad" in *Chess and the Gottvater's Daughter* in 2014 and an encore performance in 2015 for Diva Productions. He is thrilled to be working again with Caleb-Matthew C. Williams, his favorite director.



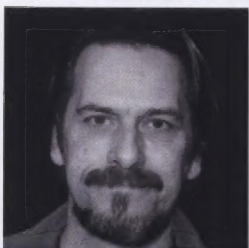


**SANDRA OPSHINSKY** (*Mrs. Taft*) Sandi has been a member of the Diva family for twenty years and returned to the stage in last season's "The First Act" in *Motorcycle Man*. When not on stage she spends time with her children, grandchildren and friends. She works for Lackawanna County Department of Community Development finding money for projects. She is also a free lance grant writer.

Sandi is proud of her work with many community groups such as First Night Scranton, Scranton Half Marathon, Run Around Scranton and Ronald McDonald House. This performance is dedicated to those she loves.



**JOHN ARENA** (*Dr. Charles Taft*) John began his community theater acting 18 years ago with Diva Productions. Since then he has acted for Actors Circle, 411 Studio, and the Diva Theater at The Olde Brick. Some of his favorite shows are *A Few Good Men*, *Cocktail Hour*, *Any Wednesday*, and *Christmas Carol*. When he isn't on stage he can be found building sets.



**DOMINICK AZZARELLI** (*David E. Herrold*) Born and raised in northeastern Pennsylvania, heating and air conditioning is his livelihood but giving history a voice is his life's work. Previously seen on the Diva stage in *Very Vignette: A Night of Original One Acts-- Not I*. He is the director of "Azzarelli Family Historical Productions", and with the help of his wife Margo and daughter Marnie and a selected few, has been conducting cemetery tours and neighborhood tours as well as historical plays. Dom is very involved with the Lackawanna Historical Society, the Triboro Historical Society, the Pennsylvania Anthracite Heritage Museum and many more cultural and educational groups throughout the valley.



**PAUL J. GALLO** (*William T. Kent*) Paul is a twenty year veteran of the stage having acted and directed extensively in NEPA and in various Off-Broadway houses in NYC. He holds a BA in Theatre from Kutztown University with minors in English Literature and Music. Paul is also a member of the Society of American Fight Directors and teaches safe stage combat techniques to theatre groups all over the Northeast.



**CHRIS EIBACH** (*Henry Rathbone*) Born, raised and still living in Scranton, Chris found his love of theater in High School. Chris is an award winning actor whose roles are varied and always memorable. Some of his favorite roles are: Billy Bibbit in *One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest*, Kaffe in *A Few Good Men* and Felix Unger in *The Odd Couple*. He has also appeared in an Indie film *Taking Liberties With Peter Rosig*, written by local playwright K.K. Gordon. Chris just finished a



commercial shoot for the Mohegan Sun Arena. When not on the stage he is busy managing his business Chris Eibach Auto Repair or spending time with his children, Katrina and Evan.



**DAVID HUNISCH** (*E.A. Emerson*) David has performed in and directed numerous productions in the Scranton area with groups such as Diva Productions, Actors Circle, The University of Scranton Players and The Electric Theatre Company. Some favorite credits include *Hay Fever*, *Leading Ladies*, *The Mousetrap*, *The Dining Room*, *Museum* and *She Loves Me*. He is an Actors Equity membership candidate.



**JOHN JACOBS** (*Mr. Nelson Todd*) John has appeared in other productions at the DIVA Theater: *A Christmas Carol*, *The Odd Couple* as Speed and *Our Town* as Mr. Webb. John became active in theater when he took to the stage at Arts YOUNiverse in the production of *The Last Days of Judas Iscariot* as Mathias of Galilee. Since then he has also acted at Actors Circle in a lineup of productions: *Driving Miss Daisy* as Boolie, *Dracula* as Quincy Morris, *39 Steps*, in which he was tasked with multiple roles including the portrayal of an English cop, German thug, Scottish innkeeper and Detective Albright, *Any Wednesday* as Cass Henderson, *Where the Bleep is Poor Tom?* as Al Donlevy, and *Busybody* as Detective Constable Goddard. Also he has worked with the Limelight Players in the musical *The Secret Garden*. John made on-screen appearances in the films *Behind Some Dark Cloud* and *Saving a Legend*, and can be seen in a Chevy commercial, *A Dependable Son*, where he got to work with one of his own sons on the project. Off-stage, John works as Head Wedding Photographer for Frankie Carll Productions.



**LEBA LANTON** (*Clara Harris*) Leba was born and raised in Northeastern PA and currently resides in Clarks Green. *Witness* is her second production with Diva Productions. Last December, she played Emily and Mrs. Banes in *A Christmas Carol*. She has also performed with Actors Circle in the past few years as Lady Ellen Merivale in *Murder in the Manor House*, Innkeeper's wife/Madwoman-Mary/Vampiress in *Dracula*, Aranka in *The Waiting Time* and Eleonora Duse in *The Lady of the Camellias*. Last spring was her first show with Ghostlight Productions as one of the witches in *Macbeth*, and this spring she looks forward to being in *A Comedy of Errors*. She was also in productions of *Fiddler on the Roof*, *Jesus Christ Super Star* and Donna Lucia D'Alvadorez in *Charley's Aunt* with the PTP players in Maryland. It is a joy for Leba to work with the talented cast in *Witness*.





**EJ LEESON** (*Harry Ford*) EJ Leeson was born and raised in Northeastern Pennsylvania. He is always on the road, and every day is a new adventure. EJ is a newlywed, and happy to have his wife Madelyn by his side. Following in his father's footsteps, the late Jerome D. Leeson, EJ enjoys writing, history, and performing on stage. He previously worked with Caleb-Matthew C. Williams on *Flesh Eaters of Hyde Park* written by local playwright K.K. Gordon. He performed in Shakespeare in the Park's 2014 production of *MacBeth*, and will be seen in this year's *Comedy of Errors*.



**KATHRYN E. PRIESTASH** (*Mrs. Matilda Todd*) Kathryn comes from a family of accomplished thespians and has been involved with theatrical pursuits from a young age. Kathryn's most recent work includes the premiere production of *Very Vignette: A Night of Original One Acts-- Intimate Moments* at Diva Theatre, representing NEPA in the Manhattan Strawberry Festival with KK Gordon's *Taking Liberties with Peter Rozig*, Gaslight Theatre Co.'s *Playroom Series* and various staged readings as a guest with The New Vintage Ensemble. She is thrilled to be involved with the debut production of Caleb-Matthew Williams's *Witness*. She sends thanks to all patrons of the arts, whose support and contributions help to build a richer and more cultivated society.



**SADIE SHAPIRO** (*Charlotte Whithers*) A student at Abington Heights Middle School, Sadie is a seasoned performer at the age of 11. She has been dancing since she was 3 and acting with Diva Theater since she was 6. She's been a part of many productions including *Wonderland*, *The Best Christmas Pageant Ever*, and *It's a Wonderful Life the Radio Play*. This past holiday season Sadie joined the cast of the Scranton Cultural Center's production of *The Happy Elf* for its world premiere. When Sadie is not at school or acting and dancing, she loves to ski and fish with her dad, and shop and go to the movies with her mom.



**LIZ STANTON** (*Katherine Evans*) Liz did some acting all throughout high school, and was in *Cinderella* during her senior year. This is her second performance with the Diva Theater, having previously appeared in *A Christmas Carol*, and is loving every minute of it. When Liz isn't on the stage or working, you can find her at a nearby bookstore. She would like to give a big thank you to her family and friends for all their continued love and support.





**KELLY ANN WALSH** (*Jeannie Gourlay*) Kelly feels very blessed to be part of the Diva family, appearing in *The Odd Couple*, *Christmas Belles*, *A Christmas Carol*, *Very Vignette: A Night of Original One Acts--The Robbery* and now *Witness*. She has performed in numerous amateur and professional productions with several companies throughout Northeastern PA and

has recently expanded her repertoire to include a few short films and commercials. Having won several NEPTA awards previously she has received another nomination this year for her work in *Legally Gray*. She is very excited to be a part of this project, having been involved since the writer's first reading, and is proud to be sharing the stage with so many gifted actors. She would like to thank Caleb-Matthew Williams not only for sharing his work with the community, but also for casting and directing her in this piece. What a great opportunity.



**JACOB WESCOTT** (*Jacob Soles*) Jacob, age 13, resides in Clarks Summit and is an 8th grade student at Abington Heights Middle School. At the Diva Theater, he has portrayed Claude Herdman in *The Best Christmas Pageant Ever* and Peter Cratchit in *A Christmas Carol*. At school, he also portrayed Cinderella's Prince in *Into The Woods*. When he is

not acting, he enjoys street hockey, video games, tennis, wrestling, and Doctor Who. Jacob would like to thank the director, Caleb, for casting him in this role, Paige Balitski for motivating him to want to continue acting, and especially his friends and family.



**SONSHINE'S POINTE OF GRACE** (*Katie*) is making her stage debut in *Witness*. She decided to give up her life of leisure after retiring from the show ring to start a new career. In her spare time, she enjoys pointing birds and playing keep-away from her best buddy, Harper Lee. Sonshine's Pointe of Grace's performance as "Katie" is through special arrangement

with her Breeder/Owner, Mrs. Kathy Lirette of Pace, Fl.

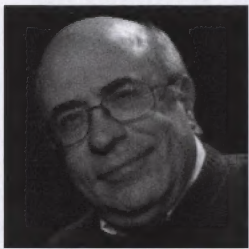


**PAIGE BALITSKI** (*Mrs. Muzzy/Producer*) Paige is a thirty-five year veteran of stage and screen; an awarding-winning actor and director both in Pennsylvania and her native Rhode Island. She appeared as Elan Alms in the 2002 New Line Cinema film production of *The Road to Erebus*, but her theatrical resume is far more extensive. Across

Northeastern Pennsylvania she has won numerous awards for her direction of comedy (*Mass Appeal*, *Greetings*, *Weekend at Esther's*,



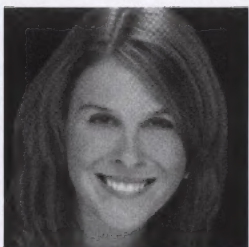
*Educating Rita, The Cemetery Club, Lend Me a Tenor*), drama (*A Christmas Carol, One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest, A Few Good Men, Wicked West*) and musical theater (*Chicago, Peter Pan, The Wizard of Oz, Oliver, Guys and Dolls*). As an actor, she has thrilled audiences in *House of Blue Leaves* (Bananas), *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Titania), *Six Degrees of Separation* (Kitty), *The Pajama Game* (Agnes), and *A Streetcar Named Desire* (Blanche) to mention a few. Active in the community at large, Paige serves on the Board of Directors of the Northeastern Pennsylvania Theatrical Alliance as past President. She is the Executive Director of The Greater Scranton Film Office, Artistic Director of The Diva Production Company and Duryea Dinner Theater and Project Director of First Night Scranton.



**BOB BALITSKI** (*Lighting Director, Sound Director, Producer*) Bob has been active in all aspects of theatre for almost forty years. An accomplished actor, he has performed in Philadelphia, New York, Rhode Island and Northeastern Pennsylvania. His roles have run the spectrum from comedy (George Hay in *Moon Over Buffalo*, David O. Selznick in *Moonlight and Magnolias*) to drama (Robert in *Proof*, Uncle Peck in *How I Learned to Drive*, Scrooge in *A Christmas Carol*) and musicals (Amos Hart in *Chicago*, Judge Turpin in *Sweeney Todd*). His award-winning designs in sight and sound are well known to the local theatre community. Residing in Scranton with his favorite leading lady, Paige, Bob works as an IT Systems Administrator.



**SUSAN SHAPIRO** (*Producer*) Susan is thrilled to be part of the cast of this original play. She started acting when her daughter Sadie expressed an interest and now a majority of the Shapiro clan has been bitten by the acting bug. Susan has been seen in *Steel Magnolias*, *Christmas Belles*, *It's a Wonderful Life the Radio Show* and most recently as Molly in *Real Friends Help You Move*. When Susan isn't acting she can be found taxiing Sadie around town to various activities. When a free moment does present itself she loves to read.



**Liz Naro** (*Hair Stylist*) Liz is best known for her leading role in "HAIR" at Just Imagine Salon and Spa, where she has been owner and stylist since 1991. Liz returned to the Diva family after a lengthy hiatus to play Claire in the 2014 production of *Proof*. Most recently, Liz directed *Intimate Moments*, a play that she co-wrote with Rosanna Fiorillo-Pugliese. The show was produced by Diva in this year's festival of one-act plays.



## **SPECIAL THANKS**

William Andrews

K.K. Gordon

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Helen Lavelle

Lauren Quirolgico

Jim Cuhna

Joel Shapiro

Liz Naro

Mary Ann Moran Savakinus

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